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A
NARRATIVE

Of the Sudden and Surprizing

FIRE

Which happen'd at the

Puppet-Show

A T

BURWELL,

In *Cambridgeshire*;

On the 8th of *September*, 1727.

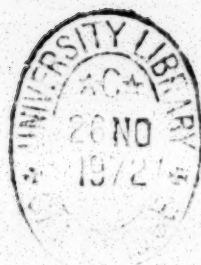
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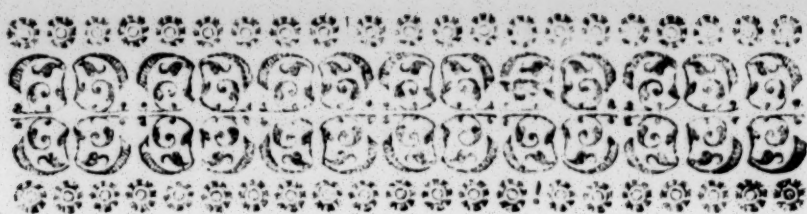
Moral Reflexions.

*Quis, talia fando,
Mirmidonum, Dolopumve, aut duri Miles Ulysis,
Temperet a Lachrymis?* Virg. *Æneid*.

*Esse quoque in Fatis, remissum, affore Tempus,
Quo Mare, quo Tellus, corrupta; Regia Cœli
Ardeat, et Mundi Mæles operosa Laboret.*
Ovid *Metam*.

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THE PREFACE.

THE much talk'd of, the
truly Tragical and Ca-
lamitous Affair at Bur-
well, is so prodigious, so extensive,
and so uncommon an Instance of
Fatality, that it justly alarms eve-
ry Creature, who lays the least
Pretence to Humanity, throughout
the Kingdom. I say Throughout
the Kingdom, for the melancholy
Notice of it hath reach'd where-
ever the News Papers of Lon-
don

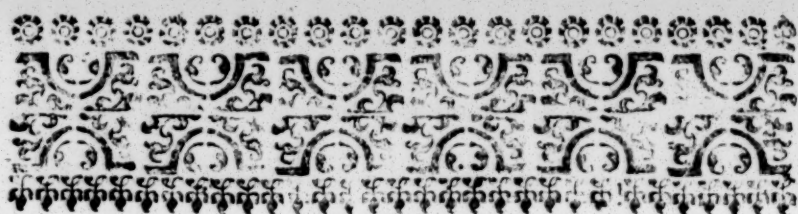
don can reach, which give a brief Account of it only in the Gross, and consequently great Numbers must be curious to be acquainted, as exactly as they can, with the Particulars of so dreadful a Catastrophe. Indeed, all extraordinary Casualties, which very remarkably concern the Publick, inasmuch as they are esteem'd by the wisest Persons, whose Notions lie far removed from Superstition, to be immediate Strokes and Warning Pieces from the Arm of Providence, have in every Age been thought worthy to be handed down to Posterity by the greatest and most Solid Historians, with the nicest Care and Exactitude. The most Excellent Authors, both Antient and Modern, having made this their unalter'd and constant Practice

P R E F A C E. vii

tice, prove the great Use of it, or (what is sufficient to spare me and the Readers the Trouble of having any Thing said here on that Head) they shew us at least, if we will pay a Deference to so good and solid Judges, that they have always thought it might be of Univerſal Benefit and Emolument to Mankind.

*Now as all Voluminous Historians are generally forced to borrow their Accounts of such Incidents from the best flying Papers that were put forth just at the Time of their Contingency; and as it is grown of late Years customary, for the most insignificant Writers to be always the forwardest in Intermeddling with Relations of this Nature; it is, methinks, highly proper to rescue
them*

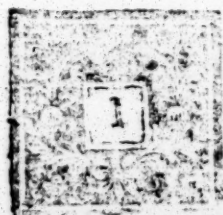
them out of such ill Hands, that Truths, which are reckon'd so important, may descend traditionally pure and uninjured to those who come after us: without being intermingled and adulterated with so many Misrepresentations, invented Falshoods and mere Fictions, as they generally are on these Occasions. It was this Consideration (and I hope it will be thought, as I my self think it, a very rational One) that gave Birth to the following little Narrative.



A
NARRATIVE
OF THE
Suprizing Fire

Which happen'd at

BURWELL.



Have been at the more Pains to make the following Narrative as faithfully exact as I could, because I think that when some future Good History shall come out concerning the Present Times, this Account will better deserve a Place in it, than some noted Casualties, that are here and there set down at large by *Bacon* and *Baker*, and sometimes take up whole Pages in *Clarendon* and *Eachard*.

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A



A Barn in *Burwell*, a Village three Miles from *Newmarket*, was the Scene of Action, a Man's taking it to exhibit a Puppetshow, by whose name was Sheppard. They name one Richard Whittock, to have had the Unfortunate Hand, that singly prov'd unlucky enough to involve such Numbers of Persons and so many whole Mourning Families in one fatal Calamity. Some give it out he did it by Accident, and Cry out aloud on his Negligence, others inflame the Guilt beyond what one would be willing to believe of any living Man, for fear of too much disgracing Humane Nature, that it was an obstinate Masacreering Action done of purpose out of a Pique for not having a bare Curiosity satisfy'd to be let into the Entertainment. We shall hereafter examine Circumstances and leave the Reader to judge if he was a Casual or Wilful Incendiary. It is certain his Lanthorn in the Stable gave Fire to the Barn scarce had the Fire enter'd, before, as if it knew it should prove Master, it spread and raged with an unusual Violence, and the Materials, it had to work upon, being very dry, it shot suddenly from one End of the Roof to the other.

In this first View of it, How in the Name of Terror and Perplexity shall we describe the People inclosed, as it were, in an Oven, where they had promised themselves a Scene of Diversion? The Fire over their Heads shew'd their Eyes, that the sides of the Place were all
of

of Stone, and refused every Method of Human strength or Contrivance for Escape: There was nothing but one small Door, and that was so strongly Nailed up, and they without Instruments to force it, that that very Place, by which alone they could hope for Remedy, might be counted, on the contrary, the Seal of their Destiny.

Here let us a Moment Consider, and Consider Seriously an Audience of above a Hundred Persons Parching thus together unexpectedly, who but a Minute before were all in Entertainment, one Minute Pleased and Laughing, and the next Terrify'd, Tormented and Lamenting, and seeing themselves secured for Destruction, by that very Element that flamed over their Heads. This is so wholesome a Meditation, that it ought a little to stay our Attention, since it will not at all break the Thread of this Tragical Story.

It will be sufficient, when we come to see these numerous Wretches as yet living under this universal Pannick, kill'd and drawing from the Rubbish, to tell who they were. Now let us only consider them in the present Situation, and Shuddring under the Expectation of what was to be their certain Lot. Let us for this End place before our Eyes Husbands and Wives preparing to burn in each others Arms, and weeping together Floods of Tears enough to extinguish an ordinary Fire, on this Reflexion more terrible if possible than the Fire itself, that they were to leave, after so sudden and unprovided a Manner, whole Families

milies of Orphans behind them : On the other Hand, Fathers and Mothers left Childless by their expiring Children ; some losing an only Heir, others Two or Three Sons, and others poorer even Three or Four Daughters at once expiring altogether in the Flames, who were the Supports of their Aged Parents, that bent with the Burthen of Years towards the Earth, and needed not the additonal Load of Sorrow to drive them down a Year or two sooner to their Graves : There again let us, if we can, without Tears of tenderness, with our Mind's Eye survey Lovers, that had tempted each other to the Shew, Perishing, by Means of the Invitation, in other kind of Flames than they had flatter'd themselves they should Enjoy. Let Husbands and Wives, and Fathers and Mothers, and those that are Orphans, and those that are Lovers, read this to one another, and make the Case their own. and they will perceive a Strange mixture of Joy and Sorrow, arising from their own Safety and their Neighbours Misery ; and this Scene of Affliction will give them such a true feeling, as all publique Warnings of this Kind seem by Providence peculiarly intended to strike with Terror into the Breasts of other People for their Example and Benefit.

The Reader by perusing these few Lines of Reflexion has had as much time to pity their Condition, during the Space of their Suspense, as they had to Lament their own, and to consider themselves as so many Criminals under the

the Divine Sentence : For in much about the same time as I have been describing their just Apprehensions, the Flames had now done threatening, and were falling to immediate Execution. The Main Supporters of the Roof are now all devour'd ; Now all the Burning Top falls in upon them and Overcovers them at once. A Dreadful Crack, a Terrible Crush that must be to the greatest Courage ! Tho I know some, who could the best bear the Appearance of such a Danger, are made so stupidly and uncharitably senseless by their own Safety, that they can read this rather with ridiculous Entertainment than an Emotion of honest Sorrow for their Fellow Creatures.--- But yet in Earnest so vast a Number of crowded Victims might well consider themselves, and did no doubt, as a little World going to be destroy'd by Fire, and by meditating well on the first Judgement, secure themselves against the more dreadful Day of the Second. For (when all merry Jestis shall be past by Men of sear'd Consciences, callous Hearts and hard head strong Imaginations) this after all will be found by solid Thinkers a lively, tho' small Emblem of the Great World, which (if we consider its greatest Mirth and highest Vanities) is but a Foolish Puppet-show at best ; and shall be destroy'd one Day by Fire in as sudden and unprovided a Manner, as in the Days of Lot, when they did, Drink, Buye, Sell, Plant, &c. But the same Day that Lot went out of Sodom it rain'd Fire and Brimstone from Heaven and destroyed them all.

But

But let us now resume the thread of this Little History.

The work done, the Fire breaks out at that Door, which shut in those that were to become its Sacrifices. About Twenty Six Persons escape wonderfully by this Means, and the Fire made them way to get thro' and fly away from itself. But these, tho' living, look'd more frightful than the ordinary Spectacles of Death; and it is one of these that should have wrote this little Narrative; They would, I warrant them, have given us a more touching and pathetick Description of it, who were partakers of the Sight, the Fright, the Danger, nay part of the Torment too, and made, as Shakespear terms, it but a *Hairsbreadth Escape* from the Calamity. Those without Doors are now dragging out some from the Burning compost of the Roof now become the Flooring of the Barn, some Wretches that were then just living with Half-burnt Limbs

Of this Number were,

The Andrew of Shepherd's Puppet-show and one more, both miserable Spectacles, who survived but a very little while Mr. Shepherd, who together with his Wife, Daughter, and another Servant perished in the Flames.

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But who is that, that looks like a black Coal, and a Man by her with his arm Burnt off? It is one, that, tho' now the Eye turns away from her with Horror, once drew all Eyes to Admire her Beauty. She is the only one with her Lover that we will not name, but

but only reckon to the Number ; of all the
rest. | 2

We will give their Names in an exact Catalogue ; which the Reader needs not doubt being true, when he sees it swell to so large an Account, if he considers, what is most certainly fact ; that, besides those who being known by some marks were Buried by their Friends ; there were so many mangled as to be unknown, that no less than three Cartload's of fryed Carnage and burnt Bones, were put into Two great Pits made purposely for their promiscuous Interrment. The only way we had of knowing their Names, was a very melancholly but very sure one, by the Variety of Woe and Lamentation, caused by the proclaim'd Losses of the Distracted Neighbourhood, for some Miles round about, at their being miss'd. We will put this confused heap of Sufferers into some order for the sake of the Reader.

1st. *There were a great many Widows, who had nothing but their Offspring to comfort their Age and sweeten the State of Widowhood, made Childless.*

Of this Number is Anne Fuller. who lost her Daughter.

The Widow Adamson did the like

The Widow Rides was deprived of a Son.

The two more Unfortunate Widows

Mary Brown and Clarke, lost no less than three Children each.

There are three Men that we name more particularly by themselves, because their Ser-

rows were somewhat more particular: Matthew Cotes lost a Child and an own Brother. Richard Boys a Wife and a Child, and Tho. Fuller a Wife a Child and a Sister, altogether.

Of Fathers, that have lost their Sons, the first we name is Mr. Casbon, who lost an only Son, that was, as we hear, a Well-descended Youth and Heir to a good Estate.

Henry Cuilliter, lost his Son likewise.

Mathew Blinkingsop the like.

John Bond was ~~as~~ once deprived of two Sons.

Stephen Mannings lost likewise two.

And, Tho. Chapman no less than three.

The Fathers, that lost their Daughters, thus burnt alive, to mourn for, are still more Numerous, and swell very much both the Catalogue of Names, and still more the account of destroyed Persons.

Nathaniel Harlick, Stephen Paniers, Henry Adams, Wm. Green, Tho. Brown, Tho. Rouse, John Rainer, Tho. Flows, John Siders, Tho. Chapman, Philemon Webb, Stephen Jerson; lost, each of them, One Daughter. In all

Thomas Haler, Richard Brook, Samuel Middleditch, were each doubly unfortunate in losing each two Daughters.

John Gotton lost three

And, Samuel Dancel no less than four.

We are brought to that Part of our History in which it is proper to Examine, whether the Per-

Person, whose Candle was the occasion of this great Destruction, was a casual or a wilful Incendiary. This is a Question, that ought to be tenderly and modestly handled at present, and as it will properly belong to great Judgements shortly to discuss it, and such Persons as will probably bring the truth exactly to Light : I shall only here set down some various Circumstances that are related concerning that Action, and leave the Reader to judge the most favourably he can as I would to in the mean Time ; because, if the Person be Innocent, the very Consideration of his having been tho' unvoluntarily, the unlucky Instrument of such spreading Mischief, will lay such a Load of Grief upon an Honest Heart, that the next Crime to the committing so unspeakable a Villainy and so unheard of a Crime, would be too strongly to accuse an undesigning Wretch in such Circumstances, of having been a Voluntary Criminal. Thus far it is certain, that the Reports of some Persons lay this poor Creature, Richard Whittock, under the Suspicion of Wilfully perpetrating this great Massacre, upon only the small Motive of an unnatural Revenge, for not having a petty, humourfome Curiosity Satisfyed. These represent this Richard Whittock extremely desirous to see the Show ; and so full of Resentment upon his being barr'd out from it, by the Master of the Show, that he broke out into open Threats, and Vow'd he would Fire the Barn, if they persisted to deny him Admittance. This, as a great many Good-natured

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natured People justly enough remark, might have been an unlucky Sally of Passion, in which Intention might have no share, tho' the Accident afterwards happen'd has he said. But then others give out, that those, who heard him say it, and suffer'd by it afterwards judged him so much in Earnest, that they thought it proper to accuse him of the actual Intention even while they lay a Dying. Of this Number are two Persons, particularly mentioned, the Person, who, among this kind of Shew-men is Nicknamed the Andrew, and one Henry Joyner a Spectator there. These two Persons, after being rescued but just alive from the Flames, are said, when they were both at the point of Death and ready to expire, to have solemnly declared and averr'd, at a Time which moves Belief, that this Richard Whittock, threaten'd firing the Barn with great Earnestness provided they would not gratify his Curiosity and let him into the Sight. These however, or some other Circumstances of the like tendency, that may be omitted, sufficient however to give room for suspecting his ill Intentions, there must have been, because the appearances that made against him on his Examination weigh'd so much in the Judgement of the Justice of Peace, said to be Sir Roger Jennings, that that Gentleman thought it proper to have him Committed to Cambridge Castle; where, since a great many are willing to judge favourably of him on the other side and that it must be accidental and not intentional, we are willing likewise

wife to hope the best, and leave him to God and his Country, upon which he must put himself at his Tryal, that will be the next Lent Assizes: And wishing in the Mean time that no such Criminal could be found in the world to the disgrace of Human Nature, for whose Offence there is no Punishment in England but what is much too mild, and for which the most dreadful foreign Executions would not be too severe, we will for this time dismiss him and leave him under his present confinement, with this Good-natured Saying which the Law appoints the Crver to repeat on his appearance at the Bar. *God send him a Good Deliverance.*

Whether this unfortunate Wretch, Richard Whitteck, did all this on purpose, or by chance (tho' I am by no means fond of too often calling Casualties by the name of *Judgements*, We must however look upon him (on such an Extraordinary Occasion at least) as the permitted Instrument of Providence to work his Will. This dreadful Casualty happen'd on Friday the Eighth Day of September in the Year of our Lord 1727. It is remarkable, that, during the first Quarter of this Century, the Degeneracy of the People (among whom must be included the *Great* as well as the *Little Vulgar*) was grown so universal, and their taste for polite Entertainments so vitiated and depraved, that Puppet-shows, which had ever before been exhibited for the innocent Recreation of Little Children, was now grown popularly fashionable for Persons of every Age, Sex, and Condition

tion to visit. And Punchinello was at one time in so great Repute for Years together even in London, that Polite Metropolis, that when the most Heroic Tragedies written by the most eminent Poets, were represented on the Stage by a Set of Actors universally celebrated, he has been able to Rob both Theatres of their Audience, and draw away Persons not only of Quality and Figure but famed for Wit and good Breeding too to become his Spectators. The Masters of these Shows when they saw their little Houses crowded with these Children of a larger Growth, took more Spacious Places to Play in, and Proportion'd the Stature of their Puppets, to the Stature of those, who were become their Admirers. These Wooden Machines, that had before been always about a Foot or at most a Foot and half high, were now shot up, by the Care of the Turner and the Joiner, to the usual bulk of Persons at Man's and Womans Estate, and were grown some of them to be 4 and some 5 Foot high. The Language, and Gesture which the Prompters and Managers of the Wires behind the Scenes, were to give these Elevated Figures, must likewise, by the Rule of Proportion, be somewhat very Extraordinary. Accordingly, since they knew Propriety of Thoughts and Language would not be expected there as in the Theatres, the Managers always took care to give them obscene Gesticulations and to seem to fill their Mouths with all the Expressions of Impurity and even downright Bawdry, which was grown the Subject of Laugh-
ment and Lewdness was carried

on to its full height in all its shapes. Punch and his Companions could not incur the Penalties of the Statutes, that they had never heard read, and so might be as Prophane and Lewd as they pleased without fear of Punishment tho' it is certain they were all the while misleading a great deal of good Real Flesh and Blood. For Men of Gallantry and Design will always help the most to encrease and set off those little Crowds, where Beauties Assemble in a most unguarded Manner, and their Modesty and Virtue lies the most open to Attacks. A Puppet-show was soon found to be an Invention, so perfectly well calculated for the Meridian of Lewdness beyond any other device yet form'd by the wit of Man, that Men of Gallantry and Design joined heartily with the weak and unguarded, to bring the Entertainment into as much Popularity as possible. The Theatres had been loudly inveigh'd against, and perhaps with too much warmth by some good Men, as the very Nurseries of Debauchery : The Puppet-show could in its Infancy be held for nothing more than an Innocent tho' a mean Diversion. The Men of Design took the Hint, and resolv'd to propagate mischief still further, under the Mask of Innocence. They knew we had a great many good Moral Plays, that rather prevented than promoted their designs. Heroines were to be seen there, that inspired young Maids with Noble Sentiments, and instructed them rather to die than to part from their Chastity : Connubial Love was often set off there in such a Beautiful Manner, that many Wives, whom these Sparks would

would have been glad to debauch, went away convinced, that the only way to be happy Women in that State was to be good Wives and faithful to their Husbands. These had prov'd often strange Checks to unlawful Amours, and a Moral Speech had frequently interrupted a false Courtship, and broke of an Intrigue in the Bud, which had otherwise prov'd very shamefully successful. At the Puppet-show, there were none of these hindrances; no attention was required there from the Audiences, but what they gave to one another, unless now and then a lewd Turn was heard to enliven their own private Discourses, when the Women, laughing, shew'd they could be pleased with Obscenity, and the Men joined in the Laughter to find their Appetites lay so well prepared for their wishes and designs; It grew at last too General, for Men not to go to these diversions of Children, without having a Design to raise up Children enow, to make a proper Company for such fights in a few Years, when the Humours of Men and Women that way should be spent. When Men found that the Women came there, where they were could meet with no Instruction, and were as certain they should have their Ears fill'd with lewd Jest and their Eyes entertained with obscene Gestures; the Men thought themselves Authoris'd to venture upon speaking any Licentious Sentences to them that they could invent for the Promotion of their own Lusts: And they could not imagine that any Woman could be in pain to hear things from Substantial Flesh and Blood, that they de-

delighted to have before their Eyes, and paid to see Acted before them by a set of Wooden Machines. Here Husbands lost the fidelity of their Wives, Wives lost the fidelity of their Husbands; Mothers have been debauch'd to the ruin of their Children, Heirs Inveighled away by ill Women, and Heiresles Stolen by Fortune-hunting Men; Orphan-virgins have been deflower'd, and after Violation, left in a wide World to Poverty, Shame and Contempt. These silly Entertainments, but fatal in their Consequences, flourished among Persons of Mature Age for above Twenty Years; this Punishment happening to give such a Flaming Warning, to Fathers, Mothers, Husbands, Wives, Children and Orphans, put some stop to it, and by the ruin of some Families sav'd the ruin of thousands, which had otherwise sell Sacrifices to the Flames of Lewdness. It happen'd just about the beginning of the Reign of a Prince, that by Encouraging all the Liberal Arts and Sciences, reviv'd the taste of the People for Politer Entertainments; and during the Reign of a Princess, that by her Example, inspired all the better Subjects of her Sex, to be the living Ornaments of Modesty and Piety, Virtue, Good-breeding, and Honour. And ever since the Children may remain together with their Nurses in the quiet and uninterrupted possession of Puppet-shows, which Entertainment was originally invented for them, and is their sole and undoubted Property.

F I N I S.

